

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

What is hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD)?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is caused by viruses that belong to the [Enterovirus](#) genus (group). This group of viruses includes polioviruses, coxsackieviruses, echoviruses, and enteroviruses.

Who gets hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a common viral illness that usually affects infants and children younger than 5 years old. However, it can sometimes occur in adults.

What are the symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease usually starts with a fever, poor appetite, a vague feeling of being unwell (malaise), and sore throat. One or 2 days after fever starts, painful sores usually develop in the mouth (herpangina), and a skin rash may appear. The rash is usually on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet; it may also appear on the knees, elbows, buttocks or genital area.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear 3-6 days after exposure.

How is hand, foot and mouth disease spread?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is spread from person to person by direct contact with the viruses that cause this disease. These viruses are found in the nose and throat secretions (such as saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus), fluid in blisters, and stool of infected persons. The viruses may be spread when infected persons touch objects and surfaces that are then touched by others.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

Infected persons are most contagious during the first week of the illness. The viruses that cause HFMD can remain in the body for weeks after a person's symptoms have gone away. This means that infected people can still pass the infection to others even though they may appear well. Also, some people who are infected and shedding the virus, including most adults, may have no symptoms.

What is the treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease?

There is no specific treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease. Persons who are concerned about their symptoms should contact their health care provider.

What can be done to prevent the spread of hand, foot and mouth disease?

A person can lower their risk of being infected by:

- Washing hands often with soap and water, especially after changing diapers and using the toilet.
- Disinfecting dirty surfaces and soiled items, including toys. First wash the items with soap and water; then disinfect them with a solution of chlorine bleach (made by mixing 1 tablespoon of bleach and 4 cups of water).
- Avoiding close contact such as kissing, hugging, or sharing eating utensils or cups with people with HFMD.

How can I learn more about hand, foot and mouth disease?

For additional information, please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/hand-foot-mouth/about/index.html>.